



Luke A. Bronin
Mayor

March 18, 2019

Senator Cassano, Representative McCarthy Vahey, Senator Champagne, Representative Zawistowski, and members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **S.B. 1070**, An Act Concerning Abandoned and Blighted Property Conservatorship, and **H.B. 7277**, An Act Concerning the Creation of Land Bank Authorities. There is a broad coalition in support of these bills, including the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, where I serve on the Board of Directors.

Substandard, deteriorating, and abandoned residential, commercial, and industrial buildings weigh down neighborhoods across Connecticut, and they impose a high cost on municipalities and their taxpayers in the form of diminishing property values and lost tax revenue. If these buildings are not rehabilitated, they are likely to remain abandoned and further deteriorate.

Communities like Hartford need more mechanisms and tools within state law, like S.B. 1070 and H.B. 7277, to enable them and their community economic development partners to fight blight without unnecessary delay.

Right now, municipalities rely on tax liens and blight liens to spur private owners to rehabilitate their properties. In some instances, the threat of a lien is sufficient to motivate a property owner to act. But far too many owners of vacant, abandoned, and blighted properties are unresponsive to notices and blight tickets.

We can file blight liens on these properties but enforcing and foreclosing on the liens is a lengthy process which can take up to a year or more – while a property sits and continues to deteriorate. When we are successful with a foreclosure, all we have is a new owner – the property is still blighted. And without an entity like a land bank, if no one is willing to acquire the property at foreclosure, the property becomes the burden to the city and its taxpayers, which have to hold and maintain the property while trying to find a responsible owner.

Conservatorship would allow a community to take control of a property and make repairs without having to wait for the long lien foreclosure process. Properties can be secured and rehabbed while municipalities and the courts work through the legal proceedings.

When adequately funded, a land bank can be an effective tool for (a) acquiring properties through blight or tax-lien foreclosure; (b) triaging specific challenges such as clearing back taxes, quieting title, demolishing unsafe structures, or remediating environmental issues; and (c) marketing and transferring properties back into productive use, consistent with community priorities.

With support from the State, Hartford has set up a land bank as a not-for-profit entity, and it will get to work this summer. Statewide land bank enabling legislation will help the Hartford land bank by reducing the costs of acquiring and holding properties and giving it more flexible disposition strategies.

S.B. 1070 and H.B. 7277 would help communities across our state improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods by giving them proven tools to help transform abandoned and blighted buildings. I strongly urge the Committee to support these bills to support municipalities and their community partners in the vital work of neighborhood revitalization.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to my office, or to Hartford's Director of Blight Remediation, Laura Settlemyer (Laura.Settlemyer@hartford.gov), should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Luke A. Bronin", is written over a horizontal line.

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